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## THE COLLEGE TEACHING OF ENGLISH.

THE object of this paper is to suggest, rather than to elaborate, a theory of teaching English. If in form it appears dogmatic, this is because the writer has aimed at brevity. In a subject of vast complexity and importance, he is but a learner like others. But, like others who have taught, he has made his observations, and deduced certain principles therefrom. These principles he ventures, in all modesty, to produce, as his contribution to the common fund of ideas upon a topic which, though it has been much discussed, will not for many a day have had the last word said upon it.

*How* we shall teach English, in college, university, or school, depends upon our answer to the question *why* we should teach it.

The answer to the latter question is twofold: One concerns the individual, and one the State. The individual should become wiser, more just, more gentle, more humane,<sup>1</sup> because of it. Then, the individual should be prepared by it to combine more effectively with others for the advancement of the great ends of communal, civic, and national life.

The individual becomes wiser only as he learns to decide and to do. Reading does not necessarily make one wiser. Neither does listening necessarily make one wiser. Wisdom implies what the psychologists call self-activity. We learn by deciding; and we learn by doing. All else, while it may profit, profits in a less degree.

<sup>1</sup> Compare the expression, 'The humanities.' Here must be included, of course, the cultivation of the æsthetic sense. I leave out of account the question how far all education has these effects. It is sufficient that they flow from the proper teaching of English, and that in an eminent degree.

Deciding implies standards of judgment, principles to which reference may be made. Thus there are axioms in geometry, laws of combination and equivalence in chemistry, laws of motion in physics, laws of mental action in psychology, laws of syntax and prosody in Latin and Greek, laws of perspective in painting. No one would be expected to profit much by the study of any of these subjects who remained ignorant of its laws. No one would be expected to have a right to an opinion in these branches, unless he referred the special point under consideration to the body of knowledge, ordered and systematic, already extant. He would not be countenanced if he affirmed that, in these domains, the opinion of any one person was worth as much as that of any other. Should it be different in the English language and literature?

The study of principles facilitates the labor of acquisition. Suppose every theorem in geometry were to be read over without reference to fundamental truths, — how slow, laborious, and unsatisfactory would be the task! Suppose the study of light, heat, or electricity, without the fundamental concept of vibration!

The study of principles in English may be either deductive or inductive. If they are formally stated at the outset, they must then be verified by observation and experiment. If they are approached through phenomena, the process of discerning them must be quickened by the teacher, and thus is not purely inductive in reality, though sufficiently so in appearance to escape the offensiveness of dogmatism.

Cause and effect, antecedent and consequent, individual and environment, — such correlates must be continually present to the mind as one studies or teaches English. The antecedent will not always be in English itself; it will often be in some other language or literature. English must not be regarded, then, as an isolated set of phenomena. *Æschylus* may help to interpret *Milton*. Old French may help to interpret the language of *Chaucer*.

Language and literature are each joint products of the head and the heart. Accordingly, they must both be studied

with both head and heart. To become merely an æsthetic, a feeling, being in studying literature is as discreditable and shortsighted as to become merely a thinking, judging, and coldly intellectual being in the study of language. Language is the organ of literature, and literature yields up its highest significance only to the qualified student of language. On the other hand, literature is the form in which language discharges its highest function, and exhibits its highest potency. Hence the study of language conducted independently of literary considerations is comparatively unfruitful and devoid of charm. This does not, however, imply criticism of the scientific and exhaustive study of language; but, save in its more elementary forms, such study should be reserved for the university, as distinguished from the college.

If, as was said above, one of the two great ends of studying English is to make the individual wiser, more just, more gentle, more humane, then it follows that, in the choice of literature to be studied, that should have the preference which is the most perfect embodiment of the qualities of wisdom, justice, gentleness, and humanity, either singly, or, better, in fitting combination; and that such literature be eschewed, or relegated to a quite secondary place, as is the product of ignorance and folly, coarseness, depravity, and brutality. Of the latter sort of literature there is much in every language, and not a little in our own. The fact of its existence, however, is no reason why it should be sought out and dwelt upon.

But the study of English is also to be prosecuted for the advantage of the State,—of man in society, in coöperation. There is much that the individual cannot achieve by himself. A university, for example, is a communal product, the result of coöperation. So is a public school, or a public library. Man makes the most of himself, and gains the most for himself, by furthering all social activities which promote the spiritual progress of the race, the nation, or the community. From this certain consequences flow, which will be next considered.

The first consequence is that language and literature should be studied as the products of social life. They should be conceived as subject to laws which operate over long periods, and which result from racial or national constitution, experiences, and environment. In this way, one comes to discover the relation between the present status of a language or literature and the causes or conditions which are historically responsible for such status. One attains a perception of the relation between literature and the state of society of which it is an expression or index. Hence, with respect to the individual's function in the social order, one learns in what direction his efforts should tend for the conservation of a society in which language and literature are touching or approaching their acme, or, contrariwise, for the transformation of a society in which both are exhibiting a tendency toward degradation and foulness.

The second consequence is that literature distinctly anti-social in its tendency should be ignored. Those productions which tend to sap or disintegrate society should be regarded as inimical to the human race and to every individual comprised within it. The literature which would undermine the family, or sow distrust, envy, or suspicion broadcast among men, has no place in the class-room, save as the students can and do themselves detect and expose its vicious tendencies, and then only to an extremely limited amount.

The third consequence is the converse of the second. Such literature as is the highest embodiment of humanity and civilization should always have the preference, and such preference, if not exclusive, should at least be overwhelming. There is no need to teach cynicism or frivolity, bestiality or despair.

The foregoing considerations are general in their nature. Those which follow are more special, and suppose a fairly large college as the field of operation. I need hardly add that what I propose is merely an ideal, — that I have never seen it realized, and never expect to.

*Organization.* An English department, like a classical department, like a mathematical department, should have a

clearly defined, comprehensive purpose, which it is prepared to outline, to expound, to defend, to enforce. This purpose should be held intelligently, loyally, and enthusiastically by all the members of the department, and every one should be prepared to contribute his individual quota toward the accomplishment of it. To this end, coöperation is essential. No one individual can do all parts of the work equally well, yet every one may and should see just how the general good is subserved by his particular effort. Every one, therefore, should have received a training which takes account of the whole range of the discipline, and not of a fragment merely. Then, without having his task prescribed for him, he will know how to make his personal endowments and idiosyncrasies contribute to the development not only of his special branch, but to the upbuilding and establishment of the whole.

*Scope and divisions of English work.* English properly includes three main branches: (1) literature as a concrete product; (2) the instrument of literary expression; and (3) the principles of literary expression. These three are somewhat inadequately suggested by the terms literature, language, and rhetoric.<sup>1</sup> In practice, it is often convenient to emphasize one rather than another, but in theory they should be united, and in practice so far as the efficiency of the teaching is not thereby impaired.

*Staff.* It follows from the foregoing that there should be a sufficient number of teachers, all equally well trained, but of different ages, temperaments, and special inclinations, in order to secure at once variety and essential unity in the treatment of the vast subject. This number should not be exceeded by that of the staff of any other department, since there is no subject that concerns the student more nearly, and none more difficult to cover with the requisite thoroughness.

*Subjects of the courses.* The topics treated should denote

<sup>1</sup> Among the ancients, the function of rhetoric was primarily to train men for effective public speaking; though in modern times the appeal to the eye through print has to a considerable extent supplanted that to the ear, yet there is still occasion to insist that the original purpose of rhetoric should not be lost sight of. However, the principles of effective writing and of effective speaking are in many respects identical.

an approximately homogeneous content, or should at least permit of the exemplification of a characteristic, a tendency, or an evolution, or a related group of these, marked with considerable distinctness. Courses which deal with mere sequences or groups of authors, unrelated save by the bond of chronology, should, as far as possible, be avoided. If a course is apparently an exception, it should prove to be defensible by the disclosure of an unsuspected relation, which the instructor holds himself prepared to demonstrate to the general satisfaction.

*Sequence of courses.* Fundamental courses should precede, and satisfactory attainments in them should be a prerequisite to admission into later and less essential ones. The whole sequence and grouping of courses should exhibit a rational and self-consistent plan.

*Method of instruction.* So far as practicable, every course should aim at securing the active coöperation of every student at every stage of its progress. Exceptions, if any are admitted, should be distinctly recognized as such, and should be comparatively rare. The topical method of investigation should be practised by the students, the topics being provided by the instructor, and the works to be consulted being either suggested by the instructor or discovered by the student. The guidance of the students' own efforts should be the object proposed to himself by the teacher, and formal lectures should, for the most part, be given only occasionally, and with this end in view. In addition to the foregoing, however, there should be supplementary courses, for mere entertainment and information, with or without examinations at the end; for these no official credit should be given.

*Investigation.* Every teacher in the department should also be an investigator, who publishes the results of his scholarly labors, not once only, but from time to time. It follows that he should not be unduly burdened by class-room duties or administrative occupations. The continual acquisition and development of scholarship and taste demands leisure; and school, σχολή, means precisely that, *leisure*. In other departments than English, taste is less necessary in

addition to scholarship, or else the results of scholarly activity in the past are better organized, and more readily accessible ; in such departments, therefore, leisure is less imperatively requisite for the purposes mentioned than it is in English.

*Continuity of effort.* There should be open to every student an opportunity to pursue English throughout the whole of every year of his college course. He should thus be enabled to render his work continuous, if for any reason his interests demand it, through the secondary school and the college.

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